

## SOME FISH STORIES.

## Remarkable Facts and Pleasing Fictions About Fish.

## ABOUT THE OLD TIME FISHING.

Early Days in the Central West—Digging Bait—Happy Youthful Days—Seelens Came in as the Fish Went Out.



UST now the boys are telling big fish stories. But the old timers do not believe all they hear from youthful lips and are waiting for the first day of the season to tell the truth. The fish were taken from the streams and the old timers were waiting for the first day of the season to tell the truth. The fish were taken from the streams and the old timers were waiting for the first day of the season to tell the truth.

Any observing man could tell when it was a good day for fish to bite. The best time was just after a "cool spell," when the sun rose clear and warm and there was a light wind from the south. Then the eager boys would almost jump out of the water to get at the bait. Sometimes the day was doubtful, and very light indications would decide it. Through the most sensitive felt no wind, yet if the snobs far above the homestead swayed to the north, it was favorable; if to the south, "it was a bad day," they said. The most delicate woman might not notice the difference in the air, but the fish knew it, and lost their appetites accordingly.

THE NEW AND THE OLD STYLE. "Pop! her through, there, lively now," the farmer father would say when corn planting began, "for just as soon as the corn is in the ground you can have a whole day's fishing. And then all the fortnight's work would be glorified for the eager boys. The first night was for a good spot for fishing. Certain places about the garden or orchard were for some reason famous for angle worms. An old tin bucket was the favorite to hold the bait. The heavy old hoe, often hammered out of a discarded nail saw by the rural blacksmith, was the instrument for unearthing soil worms, which were placed in fresh corn in the late bucket that they might retain life and health during the brief term remaining for them, till they should be impaled to tempt the scaly prize. There is an old and not very appetizing story told along the Wabash about a once noted fisherman whom a neighbor found one day, seated by the creek, and accented thus: "Hello, Mr. Smith, whatcher doin'?" "Fishin'!" "Why don't you speak plainer? Whatcher got in yer mouth?" "No, nothin' but wabash bait."

THE old fellow had formed a sudden design to fish on seeing the creek had dug his bait with a stick and was holding the reserves in his mouth till he should need them. This is no other case of a man so devoted to fishing.

LOOKING FOR STICKS. The night before the promised day was always one of mingled joy and anxiety to the farmer boys. Would it rain? Would the wind be right? How eagerly the heavens were scanned just before bedtime, and how gladly young hearts beat if the great vault was serene and blue. Sometimes it was a little too blue, for there was occasionally an extraordinary softness and beauty in the blue of the sky, which country people know means "falling weather." Though they cannot describe it, the stars shine with too lovely a radiance, the air is just a little too soft and sensitive, and the deep blue above seems too lovely and low, and the cry-crepuscule is allowed, more infinitely deep and distant than usual. But if it is well, then, away, happy boys, at the first flash of dawn, dig, dig, till the earliest light, eat breakfast in eager haste, then up and away over the hills and through the dark green woods, till the great vault is very blue laughing at his own jokes, so early care free boys can.

The creek once in sight all restraint is lost, and with a wild yell they break into a run, the big boy who carries it holding the bait bucket high above his head as he runs and all carrying their poles at a "trained arm's" angle. The yelling is prolonged till they near the creek; then a deep silence settles down, for "ye mustn't talk, ye know—no loud anyhow." Then the old standard jokes are fired off. "Don't sweat, or ye won't catch my fish." "Bill, I need a snake run in that brush you're on—I swear to god I did," etc., with stories of other days when "we caught bushels of fish."

If there are any girls in the party the snake joke is worked for all it is worth. The worms are quickly impaled at length on the

barbed hooks, protesting by mute wriggings. "Do fishin' worms have any feelin'?" asks the tender-hearted child. "Naw-w," replies an older boy, with prolonged emphasis. The lures are thrown and there is dead silence, eager expectancy, broken when the first fish is landed by a wild yell from the successful one and a "S-h-h-h!" from all the others. And so the day's sport is fairly begun.

THE QUESTION OF BAIT. At a later day worms were discarded for bait and minnows substituted; a little later small frogs figured, then chipped bits of beef and grasshoppers, when they could be had, and finally the potato dry, the appliances multiplying just as the chance to utilize them grew less. At length every one began to observe that "there's no good fishin' any more." The land was largely cleared of timber, many of the streams went dry in summer and the volume of all was fearfully diminished. "The old swimmin' hole," celebrated by J. Whitcomb Riley, finally disappeared, for the streams assumed an even depth, or rather shallowness, through all their course; from nine-tenths of the creek the food fish utterly disappeared, and now, through all the Ohio valley almost, fishing is the luxury of the wealthy and leisurely, and even they often have to go far to find it.

The fish is a wonderfully prolific creature—so is the talker who talks about him. In fact, it is still a question if the fisherman who talks is not more prolific than the fish; and it has been suggested that if any of them ever reach paradise, it will be because St. Peter knows how it is himself, and will be charitable. Exaggeration apart, however, there are some extraordinary facts in the fishy line, especially in the far north. In the



"WHAT YOU GOT IN YOUR MOUTH?" Keweenaw fishermen, extending from Lake Superior to the Arctic circle, rise thousands of little streams which in the early growing season are lavishly supplied with bugs, worms and flies which fall from the rapidly growing vegetation. The result is that the fish breed these streams by millions, and in the shallow ripples it often seems to the observer that they actually crowd each other in the stream. One is not, however, required to believe that statement of an English tourist that he "could have walked across the Winnipeg rapids on the backs of the white fish."

FISH STORIES. The popular opinion about the tales told by anglers is well summed up in the one word, "fishy." Using that as an epithet tells the whole story. And why does any mention of fish, no matter how serious, provoke a smile in some of the company? Nobody smiles at an allusion of other matters related in the tale. The smile in this case is unconscious testimony to the popular feeling on fish subjects. Nobody expects a habitual angler to tell the exact truth about his exploits. The big fish that got away is one of the best established characters in fiction. Every one knows as well as it is mentioned that it was "the biggest fish ever caught in this creek." The tale is called in natural history a "true fish breathing by gills," and "true" it may be, but it has been the subject of some "whoppers," in placatorial romance. Lucullus, the noted Roman epicure, whose fish sold after his death for \$200,000, was an enthusiast on fish, and the Roman historians relate that he had pet lampreys which would come at his call and feed out of his hands.

The fish ponds of Lucullus were simply wonderful, and the practice of fattening fish with slaves (probably condemned for some offense) is unhappily too well proved. The old time fishermen of the west were unassuming in the opinion that "a fish hasn't a darned bit of sense," and their performances certainly do indicate it; but since fish hatching was established as a national affair, Seth Green and many others have claimed to have abundant proof that the fish has considerable intellect. Mr. Green says they know him well and appreciate his kindness, so the old story of Lucullus' pet may be true.

THE annual migration of eels from one pond to another is not a "fish story." They have been seen by moonlight from Silver Lake pond on Lord Island to an adjacent water, traversing a quarter of a mile of sand in less than an hour. The Indian tradition was that these peculiar silver eels were

the descendants of some rebellious inland women, transformed into eels for killing the daughter of a chief. The story of the lost engagement ring afterwards found in the intestines of a captured fish is told in every land, and regarding its truth we may close this "fishy" record with a quotation from Strabo: "Whenever a miraculous event is reported in many places, as if it had happened everywhere, we may be sure that it is not a happy accident anywhere."

There will be a great bicycle event at Chicago the week beginning May 21. An eight-hour polo day, a polo match for \$1,000 will be the principal feature. The principal amateur event will be a one mile handicap, for which nine prizes will be given.

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